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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 000039

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE MOORE.  
NSC FOR JEFF HOVENIER.

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TAGS: [ENRG](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [HR](#) [YI](#) [LO](#) [RU](#) [HU](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES WESTERN BALKANS/SLOVAK  
TENSIONS/RUSSIA WITH MFA SENIOR STATE SECRETARY

Classified By: Political Counselor Paul C. O'Friel  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Hungary continues to favor an early NATO Membership Action Plan for Bosnia, believing it could help stabilize the Western Balkans. State Secretary Szabo told the Ambassador that he fears bilateral tensions over the new Slovak language law might be exploited by extremist elements in both country's upcoming national elections. The Ambassador said it was vital that extremists not be allowed to exploit the issue to gain political power. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) As part of her introductory calls, Ambassador met January 22 with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Senior State Secretary Vilmos Szabo, the second-ranking official in the ministry. Szabo, who will travel to the United States and Canada January 23-30 for bilateral talks, noted that his Washington agenda would focus on Afghanistan, the transatlantic relationship, energy policy, the Western Balkans, and Roma issues.

ADVOCACY FOR BOSNIA NATO MEMBERSHIP  
AND BACKING FOR SERBIAN AND CROATIAN EU ENTRY  
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13. (C) Focusing on the Western Balkans, Szabo said Hungary favored NATO membership for Bosnia. He pointed to the example of Croatia, where NATO membership had been beneficial for the country's stability. Szabo said an early NATO Membership Action Plan for Bosnia would provide positive encouragement. He noted that Serbia had taken important steps in the right direction, citing recent moves by the Serbian parliament to grant special status to the Hungarian minority living in the Vojvodina region. Szabo said Serbia would have full Hungarian backing behind its application to join the EU. He added that Hungary hoped that Croatia could join the EU during the 2011 Hungarian EU presidency. Croatia's joining the EU, Szabo stated, would set a good example for all of the Western Balkans and contribute to overall stability in the region.

FEARS THAT TENSIONS OVER THE SLOVAK LANGUAGE LAW  
MIGHT BE EXPLOITED IN UPCOMING POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS  
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14. (C) Slovakia, Szabo said ruefully, was Hungary's biggest problem. Despite good economic relations and the common EU and NATO membership, tensions had worsened during the last several years over the Hungarian minority issue. "This is a crucial question for us," Szabo said. He worried that, with upcoming Hungarian national elections in April and Slovak national elections in June, the situation might worsen further. The Ambassador said it was vital that extremists not be allowed to exploit the issue to gain political power.

15. (C) Szabo, who is also a senior member of the Socialist

party, said he hoped that his party and the opposition Fidesz party would agree not to make Slovakia's Hungarian minority and the tensions over the new Slovak language law a campaign issue. Doing so, or responding to a "provocation" by Slovak National Party leader Jan Slota or Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico (whom he noted had already publicly criticized Fidesz leader Viktor Orban), could only serve the interests of extremists on both sides.

#### MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH RUSSIA

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16. (C) Turning to the issue of Russia, Szabo said Hungary was seeking to manage its relationship with Russia constructively. "We are trying to look out over the next five, ten, and fifteen years." The Ambassador noted that the United States, too, was looking to "reset" its relations. It was important to find areas of cooperation, she said, but also, in the case of Hungary, important to find practical ways, such as Nabucco, to diversify energy supplies. Szabo agreed, saying the Nabucco gas pipeline project was a priority for his country.

17. (C) Hungary was the most active EU member involved in Nabucco, Szabo said, pointing to efforts to build a common policy and identify natural gas suppliers and financing. However, he noted, it was still not clear in what direction Germany, Italy, or Austria would go. The Russians are playing on these differences, Szabo stated.

18. (C) COMMENT. We have heard, and will continue to hear, the Hungarians advocate in favor of early Bosnian access to

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NATO. Western Balkan stability is a key strategic concern of Budapest, and the Hungarians will push any policy that they believe enhances that objective. We share Szabo's concerns about how extremists in Hungary might exploit ethnic tensions in Slovakia for their political advantage. The far-right party, Jobbik, is spoiling for a political fight, and this issue would allow them to attack both the Socialists and Fidesz for failing to stand up for the rights of Hungarian minorities.  
KOUNALAKIS